



DEPARTMENT *of* COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

2009 ANNUAL REPORT

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Mayor, City of Reading

Carl E. Geffken
Acting Managing Director

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The Department of Community Development is a team of skilled professionals striving to improve the quality of life in the City of Reading through the encouragement of community participation, effective administration of programs, efficient allocation of resources, judicious enforcement of regulations and sound planning practices. The Department of Community Development helps create jobs by attracting new businesses to the city and by helping existing businesses grow. If you are seeking affordable space, buying new equipment or hiring new employees to support your growth, Community Development staff has the ability to access various Federal and State financing programs to suit your needs, whether you're a business start-up or a Fortune 500 corporation.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Mission

We are committed to transforming challenges into opportunities for reinvestment, redevelopment, community enrichment and affordable housing.

Goals

- Develop neighborhood target programs to identify planning objectives for neighborhoods throughout the City
- Administer CDBG, HOME and ESG programs to improve public facilities and provide services to City residents
- Initiate economic development activities to meet the community's needs and to support federal, state, and local mandates for job creation and economic growth

The Building & Trades Office

- Reviews building plans and provide permits for construction and repairs
- Conducts inspections before and during construction, acting as mediator between contractor and citizens throughout the development process
- Coordinates construction, repair and alterations for compliance with Commonwealth Department of Labor & Industry standards
- Works with Community Development staff and Code Enforcement Officers to make buildings and construction safe, and to advance the attractive development of the City of Reading

Significant Projects in 2009:

- Reading Citadel Campus and Reading Magnet Schools
- Alvernia Dormitory Building
- Berks Counseling Services facility
- Reading Area Community College Science Center
- IMAX movie theatre
- Major systems repair program through Neighborhood Housing Services and Habitat for Humanity housing activities
- Ongoing housing rehabilitation program with Our City Reading, Inc.

The Planning, Zoning, and Historic Preservation Office

- The Planning, Zoning and Historic Preservation office reviews all land development and improvement projects. Applications are reviewed for compliance with applicable ordinances and to ensure and promote the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the City of Reading. The Planning, Zoning, and Historic Preservation Office works closely with other Municipal, County and State Departments and other entities to facilitate the approval process for land and building use.
- Zoning applications are reviewed for compliance with usage and dimensional requirements of the City of Reading Zoning Ordinance for the district in which the property is located. The Zoning Administrator also serves as Secretary for all Zoning Hearing Board and City Council Conditional Use hearings, and provides technical and administrative assistance to those Boards.

- The Historic Preservation office administers the Historic District Ordinance for exterior improvements of properties located within the City of Reading Historic Districts to ensure that the historic character of the designated district is maintained. The four Historic Districts of the City include the Callowhill, Centre Park, Penn's Common and Prince Districts. The Historic Preservation Specialist provides technical and administrative assistance to the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) and administers the City's Façade Improvement Program. A variety of City departments rely on the Preservation Officer for technical assistance when undertaking projects involving Reading's historical structures; this could include review by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
- Planning applications are reviewed for site layout and design requirements consistent with the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO). The Planning Office provides design review and comments upon applications to the City of Reading Planning Commission. The Planning Office also utilizes the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) to prepare a variety of maps, plans, studies and reports covering all facets of development and redevelopment in the City and serves as a repository for those documents. The staff is charged with preparing and amending Reading's Comprehensive Plan and SALDO in addition to other activities such as grant writing and project management.

Accomplishments for 2009:

- Continually work to improve the housing permit process
- Participating on Zoning Review Committee for proposed revisions to the Zoning Ordinance
- Increased efforts to ensure compliance with violation notices
- Expanding enforcement of the City of Reading Zoning Ordinance

Administration

The Department of Community Development strives to maintain and improve the built environment in the City of Reading and works to enhance community infrastructure and to encourage economic activities within the City. The staff works as a team to secure and administer various Federal and State grants to maintain Reading's architectural heritage, support affordable housing, and spur economic development. This dedicated team pursues opportunities to assist residents and businesses owners in Reading in achieving their goals of owning comfortable homes and thriving businesses. Each division within Community Development works to provide separate elements that combine to support a brighter future for all who live or work in Reading. Under the direction of Daniel Robinson, the administrative office is staffed by three CD Specialists, a Rehab Specialist, a Fiscal Officer, and a Confidential Secretary.

CDBG, HOME, ESG Administration

The Community Development staff administers a variety of Federal programs including Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME) and Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG). As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the City received additional CDBG-Recovery funds and Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) funds. Reading was one of only two cities in Pennsylvania that applied successfully for the second round of Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP2) funding. \$5 million was awarded to assist in returning foreclosed and abandoned homes in the City to productive use. Reading also was recently awarded funds through the Commonwealth Department of Community and Economic Development Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program to design an arts district surrounding GoggleWorks.

HUD Funding	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
CDBG	3,551,366	3,184,221	3,174,833	3,050,743	3,098,764	3,360,585
HOME	1,059,048	999,170	992,956	962,215	1,071,352	1,068,114
ESG	137,383	136,600	137,325	136,792	135,829	135,899
NSP2						5,000,000
CDBG-R						828,217
ESG-HPRP						1,267,021

Grant Activities

The Department of Community Development works in partnership with a variety of local groups and non-profit organizations. Together, they facilitate grant program administration to serve residents and institutions who are most likely to benefit from the programs. During 2009, HUD grants for CDBG, HOME and ESG went to the following projects in the City of Reading:

- City Park: 2009 improvements include trees, retaining walls, berms, swales, grading, fencing, lighting and recreational amenities
- Community Policing: A program using non-traditional policing that places police officers in low and moderate income areas
- Centre Park Historic District: Improvements to the Headquarters Building Community Meeting Room emergency exit and fire alarm system installation
- Facade Program: Provide matching funds to owners of residential units for restoration of building facades to HARB standards
- Habitat for Humanity: Acquire vacant land and renovate or demolish blighted buildings for the construction of new homes
- Handicap accessibility: Install curb cuts to improve accessibility for mobility-impaired residents
- Major System Program Funding: Provide assistance to senior citizens who own homes in need of major system repair or replacement. Allows residents to achieve code compliance and improve energy efficiency by replacing or repairing heating, plumbing and electrical systems and roofs
- Northmont Playground: Installation of new playground apparatus, safety surface, site furnishings, ball field backstop, fencing and ADA accessibility improvements
- Olivet Boys and Girls Club: Provide recreation services, drug, alcohol and violence prevention programs, employment training, and social programs
- Opportunity House Essential Services: Provide essential services to homeless individuals and families and funding for the emergency shelter facility through the Emergency Services Grant
- Our City Reading, Inc. housing acquisition and rehabilitation program

CDBG – the acronym for Community Development Block Grant - can go towards a diverse range of activities. Public improvements, slum and blight mitigation efforts and support for affordable housing initiatives can all be deemed as “eligible” and “fundable” under community development block grant activities. Restoring playgrounds, park improvements, street paving, “curb-cuts” and other infrastructure improvements can be carried out (as long as they benefit a low to moderate income area). The CDBG entitlement grant is the largest grant given to the City by HUD, totaling approximately \$3 million per year.

The City of Reading’s HOME program is designed to assist first-time homebuyers in receiving a fully-rehabilitated house along with housing counseling. HOME stands for: Home Investment Partnership Program and is currently the City’s second-largest HUD entitlement grant (at approximately \$1million per year). HOME funds can only be used to support affordable housing activities and projects (acquisition, rehabilitation, new construction, direct homebuyer assistance – loans, grants, down payment and closing costs).

The Emergency Shelter Grant program (ESG) is the third and smallest entitlement grant the City receives from HUD. The ESG program is allocated towards operational and supportive services for registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations in the City committed to preventing homelessness and assisting those who currently are homeless.

Projects from current and prior years will be continued until completed or maintained until the area of focus meets both the grant’s requirements and the City of Reading’s standards. Programs are continually monitored and evaluated to ensure their efficiency and ability to meet the residents’ needs and HUD affordability guidelines. Feedback regarding existing and proposed programs is encouraged through public meetings and comment periods, and information on the programs and application materials are available on the City’s web site at readingpa.gov.

PLANNING, ZONING, & PRESERVATION

Mission

The mission of the Planning, Zoning, and Preservation Division is to encourage the orderly development of the City through sound and effective planning practices and to preserve, protect and enhance the character of city neighborhoods and historic districts.

Goals:

- Protect the established character and the social and economic well being of both private and public properties
- Promote, in the public interest, the utilization of land for the purposes for which it is most appropriate
- Prevent loss from fire, panic or other danger
- Ensure adequate light and air for residents and occupants
- Facilitate convenience of access
- Prevent overcrowding of land and buildings
- Avoid undue concentration of population
- Lessen and, where possible, to prevent traffic congestion on public streets and highways

Planning Commission 2009-2010:

- Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
- Brian Bingaman, Vice Chairman
- Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
- Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary
- Frederic deP. Rothermel, Jr., member
- Edmund Palka, member
- David N. Reppert, member

Meetings

The City of Reading Planning Commission held eleven regular monthly business meetings in 2009. Agenda items included:

- Review parking lot land development plan for the Aramark parking lot
- Review final land development plan for the Play Lot at Grace and Pansy Streets
- Review preliminary land development plan for King Taco Land Development
- Review the “rental regulation ordinance” - the RIA, R1 and R2 districts
- Review Revolutionary War monument for City Park
- Approval reaffirmation for Goggle Works Apartments - final land development plan
- Review concept plan for the Volunteer Firemen’s Memorial Bandshell Renovation
- Review parking lot land development plan for the 225 Penn St. Parking Lot Plan
- Review the final land development plan for the Police Firing Range and Support Building

Development Activities

Reading City Council considered and approved the following projects

Commercial and Industrial:

- Aramark parking lot: 89 off-street parking spaces
- Doubletree Hotel and garage project: convention-center hotel and parking structure on Penn Street
- Cedar Pak #4 Paper Mill: new paper mill in the former Tube Corporation building

Residential:

- Goggle Works apartments: proposed 59 high-rise apartments

Institutional and Utility:

- Albright College outdoor athletic courts; six proposed basketball courts and 103 off-street parking spaces
- 2nd St. Learning center (Opportunity House); proposed educational facility and daycare
- *For a more detailed description, refer to the Annual Planning Commission Report*

Permits

In the year 2009, 2,520 permits were issued. These permits were granted to projects for residents and business owners, and ranged from small repairs or alterations in homes to newly constructed homes, commercial properties and parking garages. The revenue from all of these projects in 2009 totaled \$996,439.

BUILDING & TRADES**Mission**

Ensure excellence in existing structures and future growth and development through code compliance

Goals

- Administer and enforce the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code
- Maintain and enforce minimum standards required to ensure the public health, safety and general welfare attributable to the built environment
- Provide technical assistance to the public related to construction, alteration, repairs, use and occupancy of existing structures or planned projects

The office consists of the Chief Building Official, Building Inspector, Plumbing, Electrical and Mechanical Inspectors, and the Trades Secretary. The Building and Trades Office is responsible for conducting inspections to ensure that residential commercial and industrial structures are built and maintained in accordance with the uniform construction code. Inspectors must review construction documents submitted during the permit process and determine that they comply with the code. The office investigates and resolves complaints generated by the citizens of Reading and provides technical assistance to property owners. Building and Trades is frequently called upon to respond to emergencies related to structural deficiencies, fires and any unsafe conditions building conditions that compromises the health, life, and safety of the citizens of Reading.

The Building & Trades division has worked with Planning and Zoning and Codes Enforcement to consolidate the development review functions at one location by providing building review, fire review, planning review, historic review, zoning review and engineering review simultaneously in a one-stop shop, establishing a seamless process to simplify the approvals required for development, and to provide more efficient customer service to residents and developers in the City of Reading.

Building & Trades Activities:

- Residential renovations and additions
- Several large commercial projects including the new Penn Street parking garage
- Reading School District Citadel Campus
- Albright University expansion
- BARTA Transportation Center renovations
- Reading Housing Authority renovations of administration buildings and high-rises in the City of Reading
- Proposed hotel to be located on Penn Street
- The Reading School District proposed school expansions/renovations
- Construction of a new fire station for The City of Reading

EMPLOYMENT

CD - HUD:	2009	2010
Director	1	1
CD Specialist	2	1
CD Specialist III	1	1
Rehab Specialist	1	1
CD Specialist I Monitoring	0	1
Fiscal Officer	1	1
Confidential Secretary	1	1
CD/Historic Preservation Specialist	1	0
CD - Administration:		
CD Specialist II	1	0
Property Improvement Division Manager	1	0
CD Historic Preservation Specialist	0	1
Zoning Administration	1	1
Building Official	1	1
CD - Trades:		
Secretary	1	1
Building Inspector	1	1
Plumbing Inspector	1	1
Heating (HVAC) Inspector	1	1
Electric Inspector	1	1
CD - Zoning:		
Zoning Technician	1	1
Zoning Inspector	1	1
Officer	1	0
CD - Planning:		
Planner I	0	0
Planner III	1	1

Terms:

CD: Community Development

CDBG: Community Development Block Grant

CDBG-R: Community Development Block Grant-Recovery

CSBG: Commonwealth Community Services Block Grant

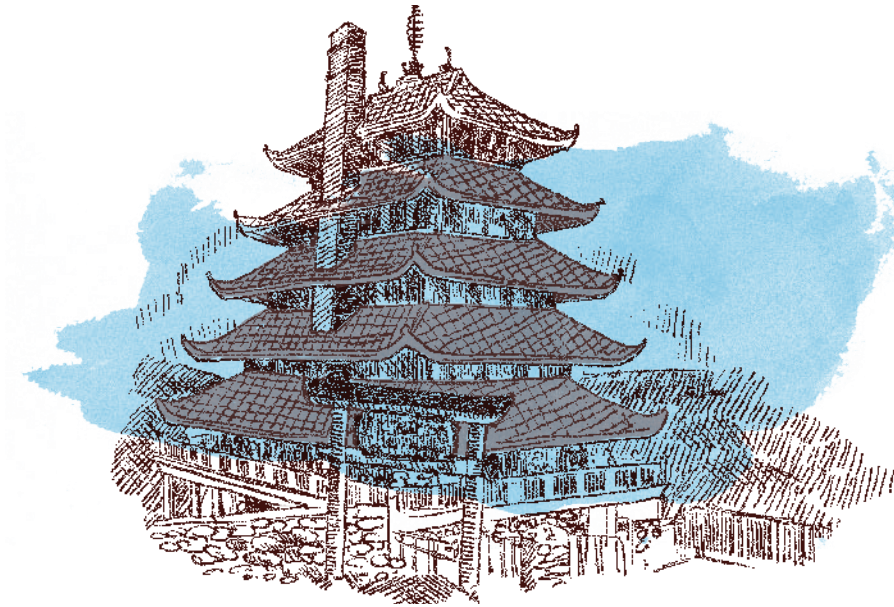
ESG: Emergency Shelter Grant

HOME: Home Investment Partnership Program

HPRP: Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program

HUD: Department of Housing and Urban Development

NSP2: Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2



DEPARTMENT *of* COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Thomas M. McMahon, Mayor

Reading City Council:

Vaughn Spencer, Council President
Francis Acosta; District 1
Marsha Goodman-Hinnershitz; District 2
Dennis Sterner; District 3
Stratton Marmarou; District 4
Donna Reed; District 5
Jeffery Waltman; District 6